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GOOD READING WITHIN REACH OF MORE FARM FAMILIES

A radio talk by Miss Elizabeth F. Moreland, State Extension Agent in Community Service, Knoxville, Tennessee, delivered in the Home Demonstration Radio Hour, November 6, 1935, and broadcast by a network of 47 associate NBC radio stations.

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How many of you have ever said "Oh, if I just had a good book to read!"? The mining town of Whitwell, Tennessee, at the foot of Signal Mountain had said it times without number, but what good had it done? There seemed no way in the world to get a library. Town and county finances were too low to even consider it, but a library was their dream!

Then one day in the Home Demonstration meeting the farm women realized that they perhaps were the ones who might make the community's dream come true. Right then they chose as their main project for the year, "A library, however small! They could not do it by themselves, of course, but they would lead the way.

The Home Agent appointed a library committee of five - a teacher, a storekeeper, a preacher and two homemakers from the club. Last February she and I met with this committee. We met in the store so that its owner might keep his eye on his goods while his thoughts were on the library. Three things were uppermost in our planning - Books; a place to put the books; and a person to keep them.

Varied and ingenious were the plans for making money. First, a community party with an acceptable book, or the price of one, as the admission fee. Later a spelling match, a quilting bee, a dollar day - all sorts of things - with different groups of people in charge of each. A business man provided a place for the books in a vacant room in his building. A club member was given charge of them. The library is now six months old and owns 212 good books. Every Saturday more than 100 of them are taken out into the homes. Their use is not limited to those in the community. One of the most regular patrons is an old man from six miles back in the country. It seems that everywhere country people love to share whatever they have with others. They carry that trait over into their book plans; and that is one reason, I think, why Home Demonstration women succeed so well with their library ventures. Here is a characteristic incident - it occurred in a village where the book project had recently been started. They had only about 40 books. A little barefoot boy of 12 appeared one day at the door, dug his toes into the ground, jammed his hands in his pockets and asked "Is this a public library?" He had walked three miles across a mountain where only a foot path ran, to ask that question. No one there knew him or had ever seen him before, but he took one of the books back home with him. And many a time since he has returned for another. Sometimes he carries three or four back with him, to people along the way.

Twenty-four other Tennessee communities, through their clubs, are working on the same kind of projects, but with interesting variations. At Galbraith Springs prize money, won at the Fair, bought the first books. In a nearby community, "Library hens" (have you ever heard of one before?) produced not only eggs, but books!

The Rogersville folks opened their library in the front part of a furniture store, using a bookcase, table and chairs from the store's stock. This location proved mutually beneficial. More than once the furniture was sold right out from under the library, necessitating several movings of the books. When later they

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transferred this collection to the Court House and needed a bookcase of their own - lumber, glass, hinges, locks, paint and labor; each one was donated by a different person. It is that kind of "friendly spirit in a town" which makes it possible to begin a library project without an appropriation.

Montgomery County is now in the midst of an interesting experiment. With a courage born of unselfishness, all 16 of the Demonstration Clubs in the county agreed to begin their library projects simultaneously, and turn over everything they acquired to a central committee; who in turn would buy the books, make up 16 equal collections and place them in the communities; later, they will be responsible for rotating its books. They are for the use of any person in the county who wishes to read, but are to be quartered in the Home Demonstration communities so that club members may care for them. The committee has just placed the first three collections, (doing it alphabetically, with favor shown to none). The other 13 communities are waiting for theirs - willing, it seems, to exercise patience; because they understand that this plan, when completed, will have multiplied by 16, the number of books for each community.

Along with every such undertaking we use our reading projects, discussing in the clubs "Why read", "What to read", "How to read"; for there is a difference between "reading" and "good reading."

You see all sorts of opportunities present themselves if your eyes are open to the book needs about you.

In these ways, and others, the Tennessee Extension Service is attempting to help rural people put "good reading within the reach of more farm families".

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